

"OUTWITTED"—A CHICAGO INCIDENT BY HAMSON

Foremost Scandinavian Author Tells of His Experience as a Street Car Conductor Twenty-five Years Ago

By KNUT HAMSON.
English Version by Herman Bernstein.

Knut Hamson, the foremost Scandinavian writer to-day and author of "Hunger," "Victoria," &c., visited the United States a quarter of a century ago. The following was one of his experiences in this country:

I WAS a conductor on a street car in Chicago. At first I was appointed on the Halsted line, which ran from the center of the city to the cattle market. For those of us who worked at night that line was not at all safe, as a number of suspicious characters traveled there at night. Conductors had no right to shoot and kill people, for the street railway company would have to pay a heavy fine in such cases.

As for me, I did not even have a revolver, and I simply relied upon good

ing strange in such a question, and I told him how much I was getting.

"Would you like to make a ten dollar bill?" he asked.

I answered that I would.

Without any hesitation he took out his pocketbook and handed me a bill, adding that he trusted me.

"But what do you want me for?" I asked.

He asked for my schedule and said:

"You are on duty at 8 o'clock this evening, are you not?"

"I am."

"You will have to do me a little service during one of your trips. Here at the corner of Monroe street we pass a hole which leads to the underground cable. It is covered with a lid. I will lift that lid and lower myself into that hole."

"Do you want to commit suicide?"

"Oh, no! I simply want to give the impression that I intended to do it."

"Yes; she will be at the grip, near the motorman."

I was surprised. The platform occupied by the motorman was an open place, and it was very cold there in the winter time.

"She will be there," repeated the gentleman. "In a letter to her lover she promised to be there this evening. I have seen the letter."

"Very well. But I must caution you to remove the lid and get down quickly. Otherwise the following car may jump on you. The cars pass there every three minutes."

"I know all that," answered the man. "The lid will be removed before I come there."

"Another question. How will you know just when your wife is coming?"

"I will get the information over the telephone. I have people watching her. My wife will wear a brown fur coat. You



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luck. But then it is very seldom that a man is entirely unarmed. For instance, I had the iron wheel bar which I could remove at a moment's notice, and which could be of great service to me. I made use of it only once.

In 1886 I was working on the car at night all Christmas week, and nothing happened to me. One night a crowd rushed in near the cattle market and filled the car. They were all intoxicated and had bottles along with them. They sang loudly and refused to pay their fare. They said that they had paid their fare to the company all the year round, and now, when Christmas time came, they did not want to pay. There was nothing queer in their argument, but I did not dare carry them free of charge for fear that there might be some spies in the employ of the company who were obliged to watch after the honesty of the conductors.

A constable boarded the car. After staying there a few minutes and saying a few words about Christmas and the weather he jumped off, for there was little room on the car. I knew well that if the constable had said one word the passengers would pay their fares, but I did not tell him anything.

"Why didn't you report us to the policeman?" asked one of the passengers.

"I didn't think it necessary to do that," I replied, "for I am dealing with gentlemen."

Some of the passengers began to laugh at me, but there were two or three who now sided with me. They paid for all. A year later, around Christmas time, I was working on the Cottage line. There was a striking difference between these lines. The tramway consisted now of two and sometimes of three cars; the cars were worked by means of an underground cable. The public in that part of the city was better and I had to collect the five cent pieces with gloves. There I had no strong sensations to experience, but I soon grew tired of seeing these villa dwellers and listening to their conversations.

On Christmas day of 1887 I experienced something unusual even there. I was working then in the daytime. A gentleman boarded the car, and it was evident that he was eager to talk with me. As I was going through the cars, he waited for me on the rear platform and immediately resumed our interrupted conversation. He was a man of about 30, pale faced, with a mustache; he was very neatly dressed, but without an overcoat, notwithstanding the sharp cold.

"I rushed out of my house without dressing properly," he said. "I wanted to overtake my wife."

"Buying Christmas presents?" I remarked.

"Exactly," he replied, with a smile. His smile was most peculiar; it was a convulsive grimace of the mouth.

"How much are you earning here?" he asked.

In the land of the Yankees there is not-

"Oh!"

"You will stop the car and drag me out of the hole, in spite of my resistance."

"Very well!"

"Thanks. But do not think that I am mentally unbalanced. I am doing this on account of my wife. I want her to see that I am ready to die."

"So your wife will also be on the car?"

will be able to recognize her easily. She is very good looking. If she should fall into a faint take her over to the drug store on the corner of Monroe street."

"Have you talked the matter over with the motorman?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered. "And I gave him also \$10. But I would not want you to talk to him about this matter. Don't

PURSUED CLOSELY BY A GREAT BIG UGLY FISH

"If your girl doesn't know how to fish," enthusiastically declared the young fellow who clerks in a bank, "take her out fishing some day if you want to have some real fun. If she knows how to fish it won't be half so much fun, and it will be all the more fun if you don't know how to fish yourself."

Then the enthusiastic young man proceeded to explain his proposition.

"A friend and I," said he, "got our girls to go to Greenwood Lake last Sunday. We hadn't any idea what we were going to do or see when we got there, and we didn't seem to care, only so we ran against a good time."

"On the way up I asked the conductor of the train what we were likely to find at the lake to sort of round out a day with some fun mixed up with it."

"Do you folks dance?" said he.

"Sure thing," said I.

"Can you fish?" said he.

"No," said I, positively.

"None of you?" said he.

"Not one of us," I said.

"Then go fishing," said he, and passed on.

"We thought it was kind of queer advice, but the conductor seemed to know what he was talking about, and we made up our minds to take his advice and go fishing. When we got to the lake we found a man who had boats and fishing things to hire, got a couple of boats, a fishpole apiece and some bait, and prepared to go fishing."

"Where's the best place to fish?" I asked the man who hired the outfit from.

"Know much about fishing?" he asked.

"I told him we didn't know a thing about fishing."

"Don't make no difference then," said he, "where you fish."

"Well, what kind of fish do we catch?" said I.

"If you don't know how to fish," said the man, "there ain't no tellin' what you won't catch, the way fish bites in this pond."

"This seemed to bear out the advice the conductor had handed us, and I considered that we were following the right path to overhaul him, so after the man had told us how to bait our hooks we rowed out on the lake and went to fishing. Our boats drifted about for a while, and as the situation was all to the restful and dreamy I was passing quite a few

other great jump in the air and with a tremendous lunge tore loose from the hook and didn't come for us again. Following its example Sue's fish did the same act. Sue gave one shriek of joy and exclaimed:

"Oh, thank goodness, Charlie. He's gone at last!"

"When my friend came up and we told him of our adventure he didn't seem to have words to make any comment on it for a while. Then he said:

"Wonder why it wouldn't have been the proper thing to yank them fish in and land 'em in your boat?"

"Why of course it would, Charlie!" said Sue reproachfully. "Why in the world didn't you think of that? The very idea!"

"I wondered a little at it myself and decided that we would try 'em again. We did it and it wasn't long before Sue yelled that the fish was after her pole again. Whether it was the same one or not I don't know, but it looked exactly like it when it jumped and we got it in the boat and killed it with an oar. A lot more fish tackled us before the day was over and most of 'em we didn't yank in and land, but we had heaps of fun seeing 'em get away."

"That conductor sure did know what he was talking about. Yes, yes. There's a heap more fun if you don't know how to fish and if your girl don't know how than there is in knowing how."

VAGARIES OF SOUND

During the firing of minute guns by the British fleet at Spithead on one occasion the sounds were heard at surprising distances inland, and the scientists gathered many interesting facts.

It seems to be established that not only the direction of the wind, but its relative velocity at different elevations from the ground, affected the direction of the sound waves. In some cases contrary winds refracted the sounds over the heads of observers between ten and forty-five miles from the ships, so that they did not hear the guns, but the same waves were afterward brought to the ground by favorable upper currents, rendering the sounds audible at fifty miles, and even as far as 140 miles, while at eighty-four miles they were so loud that laborers in the fields put down their spades to listen to them.

"Then I certainly did yell for my friend to get in there on the double quick with that gun of his. Seems to me that those two big and ugly fish must have caught on to the meaning of that hurry call, for while my friend was on his way in answer to it the fish on my line gave one

mention anything to him."

"Very well."

"On nearing Monroe street go over to the motorman's platform and watch carefully. When you see my head above the hole signal to stop the car. The motorman will help you to overpower me and pull me out of the hole, although I will keep insisting that I want to die."

I thought the matter over a while and then said:

"It seems to me that you could have saved your money. All you would have to do would be to get into the hole."

"Oh," exclaimed the man. "But it might happen that the motorman would not notice me and that you would not notice me either."

We talked a little while longer about various matters. The man went with us to the end of the line and then returned.

At the corner of Monroe street he said:

"This is the drug store where you should take my wife in case she faints."

Then he jumped off.

I was richer by \$10. Thank God, there are lucky days in a man's life. All winter long I had covered my chest with paper to protect it from the strong, penetrating wind. Every time I moved the paper cracked noisily, which embarrassed me very much, for my fellow conductors always had fun at my expense. Now I

was enabled to buy a heavy coat. "When my comrades feel me the next time to hear the paper crackle there will be no noise any longer," I thought.

My car made three trips after the incident with the man and nothing happened. But as we started out on the fourth trip a young lady boarded the car near Cottage station, and sat down near the motorman. She wore a brown fur coat.

When I came over to collect the fare she looked at me with an open face.

"Poor woman, you will have to go through a terrible experience soon," I thought. "But you are somewhat to blame and now you must pay the penalty. At any rate I shall be glad to carry you tenderly to the drug store."

We were going toward the city.

Suddenly I noticed that the motorman was talking to the lady. What could he say to her I wondered. Besides, it was against the rule for the motorman to talk to passengers while he was on duty.

To my great surprise I saw that the lady moved nearer to the motorman and that she was listening intently to what he was telling her.

We were rolling along to the city. We stopped, passengers boarded the cars; we stopped again and passengers got

out. Things went smoothly, as usual. Finally we were nearing Monroe street.

I thought that the eccentric young man had selected the spot wisely, for the corner of Monroe street was very quiet and there would be no one to hinder him from getting into the hole. Then I recalled that I had seen people working for the company repairing the cable in that same hole. But I knew that if he remained there while the car was passing he must lose his life.

Just before reaching Monroe street I walked over to the motorman's platform. Neither the motorman nor the lady was talking now. The last thing I noticed was that the motorman shook his head, indicating that he agreed with her; and then he looked ahead and started the car at full speed.

"Slow down a bit," I said to the motorman.

I noticed a black spot in the middle of the road in front of us. That must have been the head of the man above the ground.

I looked at the lady. Her eyes seemed fixed on the same spot and she clutched her seat firmly. It seemed to me that she was nervous because of the possibility of an accident. What will happen

to her. I wondered, when she finds out that the man on the road was her own husband?

But the motorman did not slacken the speed of the car. I shouted to him that there was a man in the hole in front of us, but he paid no attention to that. Now we could clearly see the man's head. There was the poor madman in the hole, facing us.

I took out my whistle and blew it. The motorman kept going ahead at full speed. Another few seconds and the misfortune must occur. I began to ring the bell; finally I rushed over to the brake. But it was too late. The car had passed over the hole before it could be stopped.

I jumped off the car greatly excited, remembering but one thing—that I must save the man, who would offer resistance. I rushed back to the motorman's platform dreadfully agitated. The motorman was also confused. He kept asking me whether there was really some one in the hole, adding that he could not understand why he was unable to stop the car in time. The young woman cried:

"How terrible! How terrible!"

She turned pale and clutched at her seat convulsively. But she did not faint. A little while later she stepped down from the motorman's platform and walked away.

A big crowd had gathered. The man was dead. His body was removed. The constable took the names of many of the people. All the witnesses testified that I signalled, whistled and even rushed over to the brake in my effort to stop the car. And then we were to be examined at the office.

The motorman asked me to lend him my penknife. I did not quite understand what he intended to do with it. I said that we had had enough of one misfortune. Then he smiled and showed me his revolver. He said that he did not need the knife for any foolish act. Upon getting the knife he bade me good-by saying that he could not work any more on that car; he said that I would have to take the car back myself. He showed me how to do it. He then explained that he wanted my knife in order to cut off the buttons of his uniform.

Then he went off.

There was nothing else left for me to do but take the car back to the station. Behind me there were several cars waiting for me to start. And as I had had some experience in driving a car I brought it to the yard safely.

One evening, between Christmas and New Year's, I was roaming about in the city. As I neared one of the railroad stations I decided to go in for a while to see the departing trains. Suddenly some one called me by name. That was Pat, the motorman. It took me some time to recognize him. He was well dressed and his beard had been shaved off. I uttered an exclamation.

"Hush! not so loud! Well, how is the case?" asked Pat.

"We were examined," I replied. "Now they are looking for you."

Pat said: "I am going West. What is the use of staying here? I made \$7 or \$8 a week and it cost me \$4 a week to live. I am going to get some land. I'll be a farmer. I have some money of course. If you want to come along we will find some good land near Frisco."

"I can't go with you," I answered.

"Oh, yes, by the way, here is your knife. Thank you for lending it to me. You see there is no future in working on the car. I have worked for three years and now I have my opportunity to break away from this work."

The whistle blew.

"Well, good-by," said Pat. "Listen. How much did you get from the man who ran over?"

"Ten dollars."

"I got the same. He paid quite well, but his wife paid better."

"His wife?"

"His young wife yes. We fixed it up together. It was all the same to me whether I wanted a thousand or two, she had to get rid of her husband. Now I can start an easier life on the money she gave me."



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